

Excerpts from "Our enemy Japan" by Wilfrid Fleisher (1943)

pp. 48-49

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Negotiations leading up to the Anti-Comintern Pact originated in Tokyo in the spring of 1936 among a group of officers of the Japanese General Staff of the rank of colonel and German and Polish diplomats in Tokyo.

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When the idea met with favor in Berlin the negotiations were transferred there, and Colonel Ott was recalled to the German capital in the summer of 1936 to take part in them. The negotiators were Von Ribbentrop, who later returned to Berlin from his post as ambassador to London to sign the pact, and Ott on the German side, and Lieutenant General Hiroshi Oshima, the Japanese military attache in Berlin, and Toshio Shiratori, then Japanese minister to Sweden, who made frequent trips to Berlin to join in the discussions.

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The pact was so unpopular when Toshio Shiratori, one of its co-authors, returned to Japan from his post as minister to Sweden at the close of 1936 that relatives and friends of his sent word to Kobe, where he landed, advising him to refrain from giving any interview or making any statements about the pact which they felt would prove harmful to his career.

Shiratori told me himself, after his return from Sweden, that the pact had purposely been worded vaguely so that it might serve as a frame for any kind of picture which might later be drawn in. He said that this was the strength of the pact, as it afforded a very loose and wide opportunity for its implementation. When I asked Shiratori what his role had been in the negotiations, he likened it to a legend, often told in Japan, that Chinese soldiers in the second line of battle are used to fire on the front line when they are tempted to retreat. Shiratori said his part had been that of "a second-line Chinese soldier."